

Dutugemunu Episode Re-Examined

[This is essentially a Sri Lankan subject but of worldwide importance today]

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At a time like the present when sanity and intellectual honesty are not well wedded to scholarship one does not feel very optimistic about giving public lectures on subjects like Dutugemunu, or much less on Dutugemunu Episode Re-examined. We have come to this conclusion, much against our liking, after watching the field patiently during the last two or three decades. We have also attempted to understand with detachment the causes that contribute to the creation of such a state of affairs.

Preconceived notions, born for the most part out of lamentable howlers which result from incorrect translations and consequent misinterpretations of primary sources compiled in other languages, rank foremost among these causes. We categorically declare that such misconceptions, no matter what their source of origin may be, are unhealthy symptoms in scholarship, and wish to go further to explore and detect these submerged explosives, planted in ignorance or through misdirection. On the other hand, digging up in the fields of history, religion and culture of Sri Lanka has turned out to be everybody's business both here and abroad, with or without the necessary credentials and competence to undertake such activities which invariably have far reaching consequences. In this process of unsupervised excavation and exploration, often carried out under glamorously attractive titles like researches in sociology, the main-stays of the religion and culture of this country have been maliciously wrecked. It is now reaching a stage beyond repair and correction. Intended or otherwise, its inevitable destination is anarchy. We are compelled, at the same time, to concede that everybody in this country has the freedom of speech and freedom of expression, even if that be of the wild ass.

Now before I come to my subject proper, let me place before you a few specific instances of such recklessness in argument and inference in fields of study related to ours. This would explain the utter confusion in which we find ourselves today when it comes to a study of our history, religion and culture. Let me start with one of the latest arrivals in this country, reaching us through a highly recognized international publication. It is a reckless wild remark about Buddhist ethics and doctrine. The carrier is Gananath Obeyesekera's **The Cult of the Goddess Pattini**, published by the University of Chicago Press. In his 629 page book Obeyesekera says this of Buddhism on page 445.

"For example, virginity and chastity in females are not associated with Buddhist ethics or doctrine; one consequence of this is that marriage is a secular affair in Buddhist Sri Lanka, whereas it is a sacrament according to Brahmanic values."

Obeyesekera at times claims that he writes as a Buddhist and a Sri Lanka Scholar [See his art. The Death of the Buddha: The Anthropologist as Myth maker]. Very well. But he fails to establish his credentials! Any Sri Lankan who is not denuded of his cultural heritage has to be aware of the fact that virginity and chastity in females, also coupled further with the idea of conjugal fidelity, for all of which the males in the society are equally held responsible, are all well saddled in the third of the five basic precepts (*pañcasīla*) of the Buddhist. Thus it is very much associated, or better say very much contained in Buddhist ethics and doctrine.

A similar spear thrust at the Buddhists, once again associated with the Buddhist attitude to females in society, is attempted by an amateur sociologist, or social scientist as they call themselves, writing in a collection of papers entitled ETHNICITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN SRI LANKA. Reinterpreting Chronicle material relating to the introduction of Buddhism, Susantha Goonatilaka remarks about the nature of Indian Buddhist culture of Asoka saying:

"Asoka responds in return by sending gifts interestingly enough indicative about the nature of the Buddhist Kingdom. The gifts include a maiden in the flower of her youth" (Mahawamsa xi.v.31). The gifts significantly included "...all that was needed for consecrating a king" (ibid.v.32)

To say the least, this is a totally uncalled for remark which makes a vulgar insinuation regarding 'The nature of the Buddhist kingdom' of Asoka. That the gifts of Asoka to Devanampiya Tissa 'included a maiden in the flower of her youth' appears to have terribly excited this immature explorer. But it is not surprising. This new species of scholars who label themselves anthropologists, sociologists or social scientists, seem to seek a new freedom in sexual behavior and try ingeniously to find cover for it under religious or social sanctions. This is what made Leach of Cambridge, the father of some of these sociologists, to rush into unwarranted areas of sex and sexual behavior and comment vociferously that the Buddha has lost his virility by being a shaven headed monk and that the Hindu god Ganesh or Pulleyar is by contrast a symbol of virility and that he is carrying his detached penis in his hand (See art. Pulleyar and the Buddha by Leach). Let Leach be corrected here that what Ganesh carries in his hand is no detached penis but the broken bit of tusk of this frivolous and playful elephant headed god which he broke as he darted to pick a mango that was on the ground. Such are our authorities who claim competence to re-interpret the history, religion and culture of this land and redirect our cultural orientation and aspirations.

One final example to establish without any doubt the identity of these deflectors of tradition, with a motivation which even at this late stage deserves scrutiny by the saner men in this country. At a meeting of this very august assembly, eighteen years ago, a presidential address attempted a re-portrayal of the character of King Devanmpiya Tissa. Whatever be the motivation for this kind of venture, these are the supersonic heights which modern unbridled scholarship can reach. Such flights neither need a legitimate launching pad nor a scientific

count down. What is most lamentable is that in the Sri Lankan sky, they get into orbit without any difficulty. The speaker was none other than the late Dr. Charles Godakumbura. He sees the deer hunt of King Devanampiya Tissa during the national festival season in a new light. The traditional account in the Mahavamsa is that it being the festival season, the king ordered his people in the city to take to water sport. Perhaps not very different from a Summer outing on the beaches for people in a mood to relax. And the king, in consonance with the patterns of sport all the world over, then and now, opted the deer hunt. The tiger hunt of India and fox hunt of the western world are known even today as forms of royal sport. There seems to be no more need for any curiosity to suspect and investigate whether this was only an excuse for what would personally be a bigger hunt. Godakumbura thinks so. This is what he said:

"It is very likely that King Tissa, after the hunting expedition, left his retinue at the foot of the hill or on the lower plateau and ascended to the top of the plateau to perform a ritual connected with fertility."

(JRAS, New series Vol. XIV. P.99)

This is no more than his wishful thinking as we shall presently show. He further says:

"The Chronicle says that the King went up alone following the stag. The Thera may have addressed the King after the ritual, or he may have interrupted him before he performed it." As for what he quotes from the Chronicle Mahavamsa, let me say in no uncertain terms that it is completely untrue. All that the Chronicle says is: "The stag fled towards the mountain. The king pursued." (Mhv. xiv.vv.4-5)

It is well worth here taking a peep at what our learned interpreter of history has at the back of his mind. His mind appears to be well stuffed with ill-argued theories about fertility cults. It is clear that his imagination is unusually fertile. This is how he develops his theme.

"The gods of fertility are always pleased at the sight of behavior which leads to their purpose, namely the increase of the human race together with the abundance of crops and increase of cattle and other livestock, and they would hardly approve too much moral restraint, particularly in matters of sex."

Whether he has had the personal approval of the gods in these matters or not, one has to, in fairness to the gods, point out the decency and sense of propriety of the Indian gods in matters of sexual relationship. Read what the Satapatha Brahmana says:

"Prajapati conceived a passion for his own daughter, either the Sky or the Dawn. May I pair with her! Thus (thinking) he united with her. This assuredly, was a sin in the eyes of the gods." (1 Kanda 7 Adhyaya 4 Brahmana 1-2)

What I have said so far as a preamble was by way of preparing the ground for re-examination of the Dutugemunu episode. The more recent decades of this century have witnessed an extensive process of misinterpretation of Sri Lankan history, religion and culture. From which ever angle one approaches, these instances of misinterpretation center mainly on Buddhism. Calculated or otherwise, this process has continually contributed to an indoctrination, creating particularly in the minds of the younger generation who have already been blindly led to grab the glamour of the industrialized affluent west, a disdain and dislike for what is essentially Buddhist. This has continually happened through a process of distorting and defrauding, of concealing and shutting out what is wholesome and contributory to the economic and social well-being of humanity which Buddhism can offer and has in fact offered to many other peoples in the world. Bringing before you a lesser known area of Buddhist influence on world culture I quote Professor B.A.Litvinsky:

"In the words of Barthold, "neither the Sassanian state nor its official religion, Zoroastrianism, ever comprised the entire Iranian world, In the later-period cultural life of the Iranian world, Buddhist Iran played a part of no less

importance than Zoroastrian Iran."

He states further:

"The above gives us grounds for radically reviewing the concept of the role played by Buddhism in the history of Western Turkistan civilization. In the course of more than 500 years, from the 1st-2nd to the 7th-8th centuries A.C. Buddhism and the associated elements of secular culture were an important component in the life of Western Turkistan society. Its impact did not come to an end with the Arab conquest and the spread of Islam. **Buddhism offers a clue to the origin and essence of many phenomena of medieval (Muslim) spiritual and material culture.**

The problem of Western Turkistan Buddhism is actually part of the broader problem of the 'Pre- Muslim' cultural heritage of the peoples inhabiting Western Turkistan today."

[Encyclopaedia of Buddhism IV.151f.]

Let these words go deep down into the minds of Sri Lankans who are legitimate heirs to the culture of Buddhism, inspite of a disgruntled few who wish to disavow and disown this. Sri Lankans are heirs to a culture which even before the beginning of the Christian era has had a more or less world wide impact, enriching the life of many a nation and providing a solid basis for the second phase of their cultural growth.

Let me now address myself to the major part of my lecture, namely the Dutthagamani episode. Let us ask ourselves as to what this great war of Dutthagamani is that we are now talking about. There are several basic questions for which we have to find answers.

1. Is the Dutthagamani - Elara War an isolated event in Sri Lankan history?
2. Are there historical circumstances and provocations leading up to it?
3. Do those who speak of it from different angles have a correct and adequate

record of evidence?

4. How far do we test the correctness and authenticity of translations and their consequent interpretations.

To most of those who write and speak on this subject, the Mahavamsa is the primary source of information. But most of them cannot read and understand it in the original. The translations and interpretations of it in English which our researchers use are too full of pit-falls. At the same time, the Mahavamsa is very much maligned by these self- same people.

As far as we are aware, we can turn to at least three strands of primary literary sources for historical research on Sri Lanka.

They are:

- (a) The completely independent records of historical events which we find embedded in the Aṭṭhakathā literature which perhaps have the greatest claim to antiquity and authenticity. We wish to speak of them as being both erudite and elite, none of these associations in any way being a disqualification.
- (b) We also witness the untrimmed growth of a class of popular literature at grass-root level in works written in Pali like Sīhalavatthu, Sahassavatthu and Rasavāhinī. They do have their own areas of emphasis and extension but the core of their tradition is generally confirmed and corroborated by the classical sources.
- (c) We regard the Vaṃsakathā literature of which the Mahavamsa is the best known, as a special class, written with a special consciousness of writing history. Therefore it is futile to expect in them the possible detachment of a scientist or philosopher.

Quasi-historical works written in Sinhala we put in the second category along with Rasavāhinī because of their very popular character. They well and truly represent the broadening out end of a segment of Sri Lankan thinking on religion

and history.

Taking up our question number one, whether the Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's war is an isolated event in history, we find that it antedates the reign of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī at least by one generation. The Mahavamsa (Ch.XX.111 vv 16 and 17) gives clear indication that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's father, Kāka Vaṇṇa Tissa who is even made an object of ridicule in some places in the Mahavamsa, was conscious of the need to safeguard the cultural identity and the political integrity of this island country.

He not only saw the threat of an expansionist movement towards the south of the island but took wise and effective steps in time to stem it. Well-fortified garrison towns along what would possibly be the path of the invader was the goal towards which Kākavaṇṇatissa worked. These steps as safeguards against a menacing threat were already being taken by Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's father, His second son, Tissa, i.e. Gamaṇi's brother was already placed in charge of Dighavapi which is described as a garrison town with adequate military strength- *sampannabalavāhiniṃ*. **This certainly must convince us that Kākavaṇṇatissa was a man of great vision and keen political sensitivity and that he was not the type to put the telescope on the blind eye.**

This is one aspect of the threat which Sri Lanka was facing considerably a generation before the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. As far as we can discern through all the primary sources referred to above, there was yet another aspect of erosion or corrosion, by whichever name one calls it, on which no sensible ruler could have turned his back. Around this time a cultural component of north Indian origin was firmly established in this island country through royal patronage. Through the patronage of this same monarch Asoka, Buddhism had reached the southern portion of peninsular India and we are well informed of the lines of communication on a Buddhist basis which Thera Mahinda established between Sri Lanka and South India. As the archaeological and literary records show the new religion and its cultural contribution must have had a tremendous appeal both with the elite and with the commoners. The writings of the great Pali

Commentators of South India like Dhammapala, Kassapa and Buddhappiya of the Cola country and their visits here bear ample testimony to this.

History shows us that growth of religious power is as much a cause of envy and bitter hostility as the triumphs of political power. Through historical studies one can discover the vicissitudes of Buddhism in South India in the centuries that followed, almost to a point of total expulsion from that region.

In this same line of aggression and encroachment came the attacks on the cultural achievements of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. All literary records of this country know of these and archaeological records are direct evidence of this. The pattern of destruction has not changed even up to this day. For at that time in history, the glory of Sri Lanka was the glory of Buddhism. Sri Lanka around this time was on the international Buddhist map with very firm and sustained links with western Asia, with countries like Iran. Sri Lanka's World Bank and IMF connections then were with those Buddhist countries as Professor Litvinsky, to whom I have already referred, has convincingly established.

Buddhist monks as the custodians of the religion and Buddhist monuments, i.e. places of worship and veneration like the stupas and the Bodhi trees became the targets of attack of the invader and the power seeking alien by which ever name one calls him. See Mahavamsa Ch.23 v.9 for attacks on the stupas and Rasavahini [K.Nanawimala ed p.198] for the destruction of Bodhi trees and stupas. Paranavitana writing in the University History of Ceylon vol.1 Part 11 p. 563 refers to this persistent pattern of destruction as follows: **"The Buddhist religion suffered great calamities during the Cola occupation and the extensive monasteries which flourished at Anuradhapura and other places in the tenth century were abandoned. The dagabas were broken into, and the valuables deposited in their relic-chambers were plundered."** To begin with, these activities appear like tactics of a frontier battle. But these, together with the expansionist movements which our early rulers like Kākavaṇṇatissa detected and discovered early, turned out to be in course of time provocative enough for a major offensive.

Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's war is indeed in spirit a war of defense to rid the country of its menacing enemy who proved himself too disruptive and destructive for the growth of a unified culture and society in Sri Lanka.

Emerging from such a historical context, with its political and religio-cultural pulsations not indicating an acceptably good state of health, we are not surprised that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi had to take a firm decision to get down to action, although it apparently did not have the approval of the old monarch, his father, initially.

There is not the slightest doubt that Duṭṭhagāmaṇi had studied his brief very carefully, and was confident of his line of prosecution. Fortunately Dutthagamani did not inherit from his predecessors too-large a problem to handle. It had been well sensed and sorted out for him. Thanks to his father, the strategy was already known and planned. With all that we have said so far our question number two regarding the historical circumstances and provocations leading up to Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's war is well answered.

Now let us take a look at what historians and commentators on history say about Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's war. History of Buddhism in Ceylon by Dr. Walpola Rahula Thera, published in 1956 has been one of the major source books (a secondary source) to students writing on Sri Lankan History. Dr. E.W.Adikaram's work, Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon (1946) covers a more limited period of time. Besides, as Rahula points out in his Preface, Adikaram's attitude is that of a devotee, lamenting over the "degeneration" and "corruption" of the faith, and Rahula claims that his attitude and approach to the subject are somewhat different. With these introductory remarks about Rahula Thera and his attitude let us hear him comment on this controversial war of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. He deserves an audition first because he has been quoted on this issue in recent times, more than any other, specially by those who have their guns aimed at Duṭṭhagāmaṇi. I crave your indulgence to listen to a reasonable portion of his learned assessment of a historical situation which antedates him at least by two thousand years.

"Duṭṭha Gāmaṇī... organized a great campaign to liberate Buddhism from

foreign rule. His war-cry was "Not for kingdom, but for Buddhism." The entire Sinhalese race was united under the banner of the young Gāmani. This was the beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese. It was a new race with healthy young blood, organized under the new order of Buddhism. A kind of religio-nationalism, which almost amounted to fanaticism, roused the whole Sinhalese people." p.79.

You would recollect that we have already examined the circumstances leading to Duṭṭhagāmani's war on which Rahula is here waxing eloquent. He is deliberately turning his back on the facts of history. Our first remark here would be that there is more speculation and wishful thinking than careful handling of authentic and reliable data. On p.63 of his learned thesis he has already told that:

"Even the Dravidians who ruled the island occasionally had to become Buddhists at least for the purpose of office, whether they in their heart of hearts liked it or not. For example, Elara, the Chola prince who ruled in Anuradhapura in the 2nd Century B.C. (i.e. the ruler whom Duṭṭhagāmani had to fight till he fell in battle) is reported to have gone to Cetiya pabbata (Mihintale) to pay homage to and invite the Sangha for alms.... following custom (*carittam anupālayaṃ*)."

In these circumstances where custom, as the unwritten law, held sway even in politics, foreign rule in itself could never have become so irksome to Buddhism as to need a campaigned liberation. **The menace did not come directly from foreign rule so much as from the machinations of manoeuvring mischief-makers. then as now,** as we have already shown earlier with adequate evidence. **The challenge was at the inability of those in power to bring the situation under control. without any personal animosity, individual or collective.** And the miscreants could not be punished except via the ruler who had control over them. We doubt whether anybody ever viewed it as a nationalist issue when miscreants were punished in this manner for what obviously turned out to be public offenses. For it was the duty of the state, down the ages, to protect religions of the land.

[Consider the *aparihāniyā dhammā* of the Vajjis].

Our historical commentator Rahula, trafficking in dubious clichés like religionism, fanaticism, war-cry etc., is obviously overreaching in many places in his learned thesis. He speaks of the Sri Lankans of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's time as the Sinhalese: 'a new race with healthy young blood.' One is not sure whether Rahula ever consulted a medical laboratory for his blood tests, referred his case to a psychiatrist or consulted an oracle. He further says: "The entire Sinhalese race was united under the banner of the young Gamani."

But let it be pointed out that while speaking of Gamani's war the Mahavamsa never uses the word Sinhala at any point. It was clear to the author that it was Sri Lanka's integrity that was at stake and it was Sri Lanka's cultural heritage that was being threatened. Rahula is indeed trying to use a high-powered magnifying glass to look for a bone to pick in our national historical records: a fanatic ruler, dishonest arahants and whoever else he could round up. Perhaps a real need, for more reasons than one, at the time he started on his research. Look how he gets his slogans and puts up his posters.

"His war-cry was Not for kingdom, but for Buddhism." This is a dangerously spiced translation. The plain statement of the Mahavamsa is "Not to bolster his position as a ruler for his glory and comfort but to safeguard the religion (i.e. Buddhism) in the land: *sāsanassa thapanāya*." (Mv.ch. xxv. v.17)

You have now to see that it is the ill-use, or rather evil-use of basic source material by pioneering persons with ill-gotten certificates of clearance which made the Duṭṭhagāmaṇi episode in history unduly pathological. This consequently led to much maligning of a historical personality. Many Sri Lankan scholars, even before the time of Rahula, are to be held responsible for the creation of a situation like this. That a similar situation has been or is being created anew is beyond doubt. Whether this is the out-come of misguided enthusiasm, group interest, careless handling of research data, or blissful

ignorance of the contents of documents written in an ancient language is a thing to be clearly sorted out. In the re-examination of the Dutugemunu episode, examples for each of these can be indicated. These are sins both of omission and commission.

Everybody appears to have been compelled to be angry with Dutugemunu for the alleged misuse or abuse of religion, out of vanity and for personal reasons, We have already indicated Rahula's misrepresentation in his translation of Dutugemunu's motive as 'Not for kingdom but for Buddhism', making Dutugemunu's venture look like a fanatic religious war. On p.80 of his thesis he adds that Gamani himself had a relic of the Buddha put into his spear. Everyone writing on Dutugemunu repeats this idea, both before and after Rahula and uses it as a charge against Dutugemunu to say that he is exploiting to the utmost all the religious and national sentiments. Let me tell you for certain that some pioneer has blundered in his translation of the source material in the Mahavamsa and consequently erred in his interpretation of facts of history. Whoever he be, many others following him in the respectful teacher pupil relationship, themselves slip at this point, like men stepping on a banana skin who slip and fall and never know or feel the need to regain their upright position.

Geiger in his Mahavamsa translation of 1908 uses the word spear for the Pali term *kunta* of the Mahavamsa (Ch.XXV. v.i.). But cautious as these early savants were, Geiger adds a specific note to his translation of *kunta* as spear saying that the spear serves as a royal standard, which is always carried before the prince. But those who follow him seem to throw this caution to the winds. Here it must be said to Geiger's credit that he has both a respect for tradition, and a sensitivity to what is logical and reasonable. The Pali Thupavamsa while speaking of the story of the Mirisavatiya stupa has the same reference as the Mahavamsa to the *kunta* with the relics which was carried at the head of the royal party when the monarch went out for water sport. The ancient Sinhala translation of this work which belongs to the 13th century translates this as *dhātu sahitha jayakontaya* which

means the imperial sceptre with relics deposited in it. What Dutugemunu carried with relics deposited therein was the royal sceptre, the *kunta*, as a symbol of the presence of the monarch. This, he carried along with his entourage both in peace and in war, as is perfectly clear from the Mirisavatiya story both in the Mahavamsa and the Thupavamsa. It is impossible to believe that in the true Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition, with its sanity and good judgement that it was ever conceived that Dutugemunu, marching out on his war of defence, had relics deposited in a killer weapon. Besides, no where in the Mahavamsa do we ever get the *kunta* referred to as a killer weapon in the Dutugemunu Elara encounter. Furthermore, subsequent Sinhala literature of the early period, following the Sinhala translation of the Thupavamsa referred to above, very definitely emphasize the idea of the *kunta* as the royal sceptre. While the Saddharmalankaraya (14th century) repeats the Thupavamsaya phrase *dhātu sahitha jayakonthaya*, adding also the phrase *magul kontaya*, the Saddahmaratanakaraya (15th century) has the phrase *dātupihītavu jayamaha kontaya*.

Why must then Sri Lankan scholarship stubbornly opt to turn a blind eye to these untarnished, uncontaminated facts of history? Turnour who was the first to translate the Mahavamsa into English, and that as far back as 1837, although not a son of the soil, appears to have clearly grasped and sized up the historical circumstances of the Dutugemunu Elara war. Showing complete familiarity with the authentic Sri Lankan tradition which apparently had suffered no contamination so far, Turnour translates the word *kunta* as the sceptre and imperial sceptre. Wijesinghe's second edition of 1889, fifty years later carries the same translation unaltered. Around 1887 Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thera appears to have completed his Sinhala translation of the Mahavamsa and this came out in print in 1912, What sort of historical tradition, oral or written. he had immediately before him, we are not certain. But in translating the term *kunta* he first uses the identical word *kuntaya* in Sinhala (ch.25.v.1) and at its second occurrence at ch.XXV.v.9 translates it as *kuntāyudhaya* i.e. the weapon *kunta*.

We are compelled to call this a blunder of very serious consequences, and place its authorship and guilt on Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Thera, no matter under what persuasion or predisposition it was committed. If one went further to say, in his defense, that he is a product of the age, we would not quarrel. But what he did put the entire line of Sri Lankan scholarship including even the English educated, on the wrong track, on a track that led to a head on collision.

Apparently backed by him, Sri Lankan scholars who worked in the English medium, started translating *kunta* as spear, also partially supported by Geiger. But Geiger did add a word of caution that 'the spear served as a royal standard.' But our Sri Lankans gleefully ignored this and threw all caution to the winds. Professor Gunapala Malalasekera, speaking of the Mirisavatiya story in his Dictionary of Pali Proper Names (1938) under Maricavatti in vol.11 p. 448. refers to the *kunta* plainly as a spear. He goes even a little further. A little too far, we should say. This is how he puts it: '...where the king's spear, containing the Buddha's relic given to him by the monks, was planted...' In support of this he quotes the Mahavamsa (ch.XXV.v.1). But we have to clearly indicate here that the idea 'Buddha's relic given to him by the monks' is definitely not in the Mahavamsa reference. By putting it in this form he is putting the Buddhist monks of Dutugemunu's day in a dangerously mischievous new role of which even the Mahavamsa is not aware. If this idea does appear any where why do we not then be honest about its location, time and place? This omission or commission, whichever it be, is indiscreet and calamitous to scholarship and to everything else which comes in its wake. In 1971, Professor N.A.Jayawickrama, in his English translation of the Pali Thupavamsa, dexterously replaces the word spear with lance and creates a completely new image of the whole by saying 'the King's lance with the relic (mounted on it).' With the pride and arrogance of this new situation, of which apparently a section of Sri Lankans were becoming boastful, contrast the sober and matter of fact translation of the same produced much earlier by Turnour as 'having enshrined in the point of his sceptre a sacred relic.'

Having made an analytical study of this process of deflection with regard to a specific incident in history we now wish to make the following observation. It is a point of which not only scholars but also all responsible public men of any sanity should take serious note. Then and only then can there be any reliable leadership both in scholarship and in public life. We observe: "The most disastrous thing in history is when history relating to anything passes through a period of fermentation, when facts of history, particularly early history, get into what we would call brewer's hands. It is as though early writers of history seem to have been perfectly trained in the art of brewing. As far as Sri Lanka is concerned two types of brewers seem to be clearly visible on the scene. There are those, both ancient and modern, who in the process of brewing add pride into their vats while the other group competitively adds prejudice to bring out an even more potent brew." It is not adequately realized that the pride of one group invariably turns out to be a cause of prejudice for the other. We would do well here to be fore-warned that boastful productivity both at intellectual and material levels, often generates toxic by-products. If historians and historical records as well as scholars and scholarship, through their misdirection, have put us into this tangled skein, wherein do we seek our solution of disentanglement? Wherein lies our salvation? Nothing short of total intellectual honesty, sanity and sobriety in the handling of our day to day affairs and an undiluted and unadulterated respect of man for man and a recognition of his cherished possessions at all levels could even lay the basic foundation for peaceful coexistence. This we believe is the only way to achieve solidarity within groups or among groups. In attempting to acquire these basic virtues at least in the interests of the survival of man, we are only reminding ourselves of the need to retrieve our long lost human values.

Here is one more example to show how diversification and diversion of motives in facts of history, from their realities to areas of hallucination and fanciful imagination give kaleidoscopic glamour to historical events by wrapping them up in multi-coloured tinsel in the form of religion, national pride and race superiority etc. We have here to give the verdict that the greater disaster which comes upon

mankind is not through those who re-cook history in this manner but via those who gullibly accept this new fare for real history. This is what happens through mass indoctrination in every camp where humanity is herded, whether it be in terms of religion, political ideology or whatever other basis of division that exist in human society. It is not the leaders but those who are led that multiply rapidly and they are the freely available soulless campaigners who generate communal disharmony and bitterness. It is also they who perish in the process as a greater percentage of those involved.

Let us now take a look at the historians' analysis of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's post-war mood. This is a very good example of bifurcation of a historical tradition. Talking of the primary sources of historical traditions in Sri Lanka, we have already referred to the two main divisions, namely 1. the Aṭṭhakathā and 2. the Vaṃsakathā. We have also indicated our preference of the Aṭṭhakathā as being more independent and unbiased and for that same reason more authentic. Relating to our point at issue, viz. Dutugemunu's post war mood, the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, the Aṭṭhakathā on the Digha Nikaya (DA.II 640) speaks of Dutugemunu as being in a triumphant mood after his conquest of thirty two Tamil rulers and adds further that for a month he could not sleep for joy. This reference to Dutugemunu in the Aṭṭhakathā is in no way connected with writing of history. Much less with propaganda. The Commentator picks up this reference to Dutugemunu's post-war joy from the stock-in-trade of the times to illustrate and explain a highly joyous mood of a person. From what we have discussed so far about the antecedents to Dutugemunu's war with Elara, it is reasonable to assume that he was, at the end of it, going through a phase of joy of triumph, of a task accomplished. This we would call the genuine and uncontaminated tradition, coming down from mouth to mouth, from generation to generation.

On the other hand, the more history-oriented Mahavamsa presents Dutugemunu in the opposite mood of grief and remorse. The Mahavamsa (Ch.XXV. v. 108) records Dutugemunu as saying `How shall there be any

comfort for me, O Venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a great host of men in battle (*yena me akkhohinimahāsenā ghāto kārāpito itī*)?' Here one is immediately reminded of the post-war mood of Emperor Asoka after the Kalinga war as recorded in the Rock Edict XII: "The Beloved of the Gods, conqueror of the Kalingas, is moved to remorse now. For he has felt profound sorrow and regret because the conquest of a people previously unconquered involves slaughter, death and deportation." It is no secret that to the Sri Lankans, Emperor Asoka of India has long been a model of kingly virtue: a leader worthy of emulation. Many such Buddhist virtues like respect at state level for all forms of life (e.g. *mā ghāta*, i.e. respect for life of bird and beast in the land) seem to have been derived from the Asokan model. And this link with the font of Buddhist inspiration in India has been continuous and sustained.

We are more than convinced that it is in pursuance of a conscious or unconscious policy of modelling and grooming our Sri Lanka monarchs, following a blue-print thus provided by Emperor Asoka of India, that Dutugemunu is made to behave after his battle with Elara exactly in the same way that Asoka did after his Kalinga war of annexation. To the narrow-groove Sri Lankan annalists like the author of the Mahavamsa, even this possibility of an attempted identification would have been more than an achievement. They were looking at both Asoka and Dutugemunu with a very specifically narrowed vision. Perhaps they could do no more and no better. Historical circumstances relating to distant past they could apparently neither grasp nor assess correctly. They would pick up a character emerging from such contexts, focus their lenses on the aquiline nose or the grizzly beard of a monarch (remember their use of words like *varikanāsika* and *bahalamassu*) and click their cameras. And that is about all the record they preserve for posterity. But from the analysis we have attempted here it would now be clear that Dutugemunu's encounter with Elara to which a series of historical circumstances in this country led him, does not compare at all with Asoka's Kalinga war of annexation. The former i.e. Dutugemunu's action, to us is the fulfillment of the obligations of a ruler to the state, a ruler who in that historical

climax rightly felt that he could not rub stones on velvet in moving forward to put his domestic problems right, while with Asoka it was the endless pursuit of a policy of political aggrandizement, to which he had to call a halt at some suitable point.

Taking these as historical situations, real or contrived, let us examine the solutions that are offered. Asoka decides to call a halt to his imperial policy and reject war as a means of empire building. For it served none, except his own vanity. On the other hand, as a member of the legitimate ruling house of Sri Lanka, it being mainly divided between Anuradhapura and Rohana, Dutugemunu had to come forward to defend his subjects, to safeguard their right of person and property, property at stake then being, more than any other, their Buddhist cultural heritage. The major ruling house being at Anuradhapura, Dutugemunu is undoubtedly a provincial leader and his triumph therefore becomes doubly commendable, and the whole of Sri Lanka would have given him their unstinted support.

Thus it is clear that Dutugemunu's achievement was an achievement for Sri Lanka as a whole: consolidation and reaffirmation of the political integrity, i.e. of territorial integrity as well and the cultural identity of Sri Lanka. Therefore one finds it difficult to believe that he was stricken with remorse over the loss of life in battle. And considering the loss of life in battle, why count the dead only on the enemies' side? The author of the Mahavamsa picks out his one and a half persons slain, through a deliberately motivated move, very stupidly though, from the enemies' side. It is difficult to imagine that Dutugemunu went to war without realizing what it entails. It had to be a decision in favour of the greater good and he would have known its cost. By speaking of Dutugemunu's remorse, the author of the Mahavamsa stresses on the one hand Dutugemunu's religiousness or religious sensitivity and on the other, by reckoning with the massacre of the enemy, he takes the opportunity to stigmatize those killed in battle as being bestial on account of their differences in faith. An undeniably unacceptable

position, judging by all standards. It is a criminal interpolation. Both these, we would consider as being misdirected and indiscreet. This is history, under various pressures, going at a tangent. In these circumstances we would consider Dutugemunu's remorse as an ill-conceived strategy which distorts history and in the pedagogical and arrogant explanations put in the mouth of arahants damage the Buddhist cause. But this story of a tear-shedding Dutugemunu in the Mahavamsa who is fooled into believing that he has killed only one and a half persons on the side of his enemy has blazed a new trail for many a researcher: historian, anthropologist and several others. Those who take this as the true historical situation accuse the Sri Lankan arahants of being dishonest or ill-informed.

Gananath Obeyesekera sees in Dutugemunu's conscience thus presented an oedipal conflict. Whether for or against Dutugemunu, these speculations are no more than Quixotic adventures.

But if we follow carefully through historical records as to what Dutugemunu subsequently did as the ruler of a unified Sri Lanka, we cannot but be impressed by the sense of triumph and achievement which he reflects. One of the first things recorded after his being accepted as the ruler of a unified Sri Lanka is the decision to build the Mirisavatiya dagaba (Mhv. Chp..XXVI. v.6-17). The imperial sceptre with the sacred relics deposited therein which Dutugemunu took with him, in his march against Elara came to be sealed within the vault of this stupa. The report of this incident is both interesting and significant. Within a week after his coronation, Dutugemunu is said to have proceeded to the Tissawewa in traditional style for water sport, taking with him the imperial sceptre. While the royal party was at water sport the sceptre was kept there in the vicinity in an upright position. At the end of the day, when the king wished to return to the palace and ordered the sceptre to be lifted, the king's men discovered that it could not be moved from where it stood. It is thus that Mirisavatiya stupa had to be built, sealing as it were for ever within the vault of the stupa what was once

the symbol of a determined march to war. How far can one be wrong if one saw in this a very early move towards disarmament?

Confident as he was that he had completely eliminated the threat to the religion and culture of the land, Dutugemunu also appears to have taken steps both to further its growth and to epitomize its supremacy as the main source of inspiration in the lives of the people of this land.

His respect for the sangha as a symbol of wisdom and virtue in the kingdom is seen in his offer to build for them a nine-storied mansion as a state gift. When completed, with its copper-sheet roofing, it appears to have turned out to be a magnificent piece of architecture by any standard, then or now. With its four upper stories occupied by dignitaries of the highest order, this Lohaprāsāda must have been a really inspiring college of prelates. This, we reckon as his first bid to elevate the religion by assuring himself that the monks of the land occupied a position worthy of them, within a specific frame-work wisely determined by the state.

As we have already indicated at the outset, Sri Lanka was a respected unit of the west-Asian Buddhist net-work of pre-Christian times. Paying due heed to this, Dutugemunu's next step was to erect a monument in his capital which was eloquent enough to speak of the cultural achievement of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. We believe this is why the newly constructed Mahāthūpa of Dutugemunu had to be, in comparison with the Thūpārāma of the earlier era, uniquely large. There is also evidence that the international Buddhist community of the time showed a keen interest in this project. Here we wish to point out that Dutugemunu's contribution to the consolidation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka won him international recognition. The large scale participation of the west-Asian Buddhist countries in these activities of Dutugemunu proves this point.

It is our lament that such a situation in history and such a historical personality like Dutugemunu has suffered so much distortion on the highway of

time, not only to a point beyond recognition but also to be diabolically contradictory. And mind you, this happens in the hands of groups of people who from time to time, going under the common designation of historians or writers of history question the values assigned to persons and events in history by previous generations, and assail the positions occupied by them in the national arena. In their attacks, they are ruthlessly sharper in their claws and greater in the venom they spit. The vociferously acclaimed new vision of every succeeding generation of scholars can turn a hero into a villain and a villain into a hero, and the power of the propaganda machinery establishes its own brand of truth.

I have by now indicated to you the complexity of the growth of new historical traditions, traditions which are often possible to be grouped in opposite camps. Since history involves people and people come to be charged with emotions to a greater or lesser degree from time to time, the subjective and personal element, either as individual or collective comes to loom large on the scene of history writing. And in addition, as the time factor intervenes, facts get lost in oblivion and fiction from many unsuspected areas of production come to occupy the prominent front rows. Or using a different idiom, we have already identified pride and prejudice as the gusty winds which blow these storm clouds of communal violence into our midst. These give a new direction to our historical thinking and compel us to assign higher or lower marks to persons and events to be collectively in conformity with current political and political ideologies. We have already revealed a few instances of pride, saddled on self-deception, riding to the field of communal combat.

Finally before I conclude my re-examination of the Dutugemunu episode let me present to you a recent episode of prejudice mounted likewise on distrust, charging with the same fury into the battle field, determined to destroy and eliminate an imaginary foe. This is what my one time friend and colleague, Professor S. Arasaratnam has written as far back as 1964: `The story emphasizes that Dutugemunu was a champion of Buddhism and fought to re-

establish this faith and extirpate Hindu heresy supported by the Tamil rulers.' Ceylon by S.Arasaratnam, in Modern Nations in Historical Perspective, 1964, p.52.

It is clearly evident that this convenient, and at the same time mischievous generalization springs from the prejudice that the Buddhists are determined to extirpate Hinduism. This is indeed very far from the truth. We have already shown that Tamil rulers have ruled Sri Lanka showing due respect to the major religion of the land. In their turn, Buddhist rulers have shown the greatest respect to the Hindus, their places of worship and their religious leaders like the Tivakka Brahmin of Jaffna who was a regular invitee to and a participant at Buddhist functions. We are sorry that Professor Arasaratnam has got his 'story' of Gutugemunu from the contaminated lot.

The Buddhists of Sri Lanka, like the adherents of every new land to which Buddhism found its way, warmly welcomed the beliefs, practices and personalities of the other religions of their neighbours and found it possible to live in perfect harmony with them. Thus we have in the international Buddhist pantheon, Hachiman of Japan and Skanda of Sri Lanka, both of whom are gods of war in their own original settings. They are both very devout followers of the Buddha and Sri Lankan Buddhists believe that Skanda has pledged to be a Buddha one day in the distant future. He has been unhesitatingly elevated to that most exalted position. These are clear instances of internal self-adjustment on the part of Buddhists, motivated by a desire for peaceful coexistence and to be mutually cooperative.

Backed by religion and the consequent spirit of accommodation the interpenetration of Hinduism and Buddhism at the social and domestic level has been considerably extensive. The names of Hindu divinities like Ganesh, Lakshmi and Sarasvati are household words with the Buddhists of Sri Lanka and these divinities have won their respectful adoration. Sri Lankans also have had the benefit of scores of eminent Buddhist monks of South Indian Hindu origin. Being

Hindu or being Tamil was never in itself a bone of contention in Sri Lanka of Dutugemunu's day. This we regard as the unmanipulated process which works in the most healthy natural way of adaptation and survival in history.

Looking back on what I have indicated so far I feel I have made a reasonable analysis of a situation which is charred beyond recognition through the ages. Nevertheless, the truth beneath this is discernible and if viewed with the necessary detachment, it means insult to none. Since history is highly inflammable and dangerously explosive, it is time now to pray for sanity and sobriety in the analysis and assessment of human problems, piled up sky-high down the ages.

[Based on the text of a lecture delivered in 1987 to the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka by Professor Jotiya Dhirasekara who is presently Bhikkhu Dhammavihari].

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Mahāvamsa - Translation Errors

Sinhala text **correct renderings**. Mahāvamsa XXV. v.

1. kunte dhātuṃ nidhāpetvā Saddharmālaṅkāraya - 1. Kalutara
Sarananda Thera 1953 p. 466
2. Makuluduve Piyaratana Thera 1971 p. 535

...kaḍupalisa palaṅgapattiraṃ asisatttomara bheṇḍivālacandravakrādi vū

āyudha ādiyada rajadū kuppāyaṃ sīrā sat ādi vū sannāha da yana siyallama samudā karavā **taman alvana mangul kontayehi dhātu pihīṭuvā tumū sakradevendra** **ṃlāven saraḥī...**

Saddhrmaratnākaraya

p. 350 Tavada Tisāveva samīpayehi dhātu pihīṭuvū jayamahakontaya pihīṭuvā Duṭṭagemunu maharajatema Mirisavēṭidāgeba tisriyanak usa bēndaviya. Sinhala Thūpavamsaya - W.S. Karunatilaka 2000

p. 142 f. E velehi rajjuruvan hā kaṭiva giya rājāpuruīayo mirisavēṭi dāgeba bandinā sthānayehi rajjuruvange **dhātu sahita jaya kontaya** indurā keōin siṭuvūha. Gaṃuṇu rajjuruvo puranganan hā samanga divābhāgaya muōullehi diya keōa savas velehi nuvaraṭa yamha yi **dhātu pihīṭavū ruvan kontaya** idiri koṭa nikmevayi kīha. Ebas aṣū rājāpuruīayo **jaya kontaya** gaṇumhayi gos e gannā tabā tibū tēnin solavāliya nuhuṇuvo ya. E āṣcaryya daka rajjuruvan aṭuōuvū senāva suvandin malin e **dhātūn vahanse sahita jayakontayaṭa** pūjā kaōaha.

1. dhātu sahita jaya kontaya
2. dhātu pihīṭavū ruvan kontaya
3. jaya kontaya
4. dhātūn vahanse sahita jayakontayaṭa

Mahāvamsa - Ch. XXV. Geiger's translation. p.170

When the king Duṭṭhagāmanī had provided for his people and had had a relic put into his spear* he marched, with chariots, troops and beasts for riders, to Tissamahārāma.

* The spear as a royal standard, which is always carried before the prince.